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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 003501

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SUBJECT: ROSALES READIES ELECTORAL MACHINE FOR SUNDAY

REF: CARACAS 3456

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Classified By: Robert Downes, Political Counselor,
for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. As the December 3 presidential vote nears, the Manuel Rosales campaign is still struggling to get its organization in place. Senior campaign officials insist their vote tabulation network will work faster than the National Electoral Council (CNE) on election day, though there are numerous reports from the mid-level that the technology and training of poll watchers remain a serious challenge. The Rosales campaign is now planning to conduct two exit polls and at least two quick counts to supplement information available during and immediately after the electoral process. Critical decision points for the Rosales campaign will be on Friday, December 1 and Saturday, December 2, when voting tables are installed and materials reviewed by poll workers. Rosales advisors still worry about the fingerprint (digital scanning) machines, which have been deployed conspicuously in urban areas of strong Rosales support. Chavez will have the upper hand on information once polls close, complicating Rosales' decision cycle on election night. End summary.

Still Filling Seats

¶2. (C) The Manuel Rosales campaign is struggling to establish its information network for compiling election results for the December 3 presidential elections (see ref for the full description of the proposed system). Eliseo Fermin, who co-chairs the election monitoring section of the campaign, insisted to Deskoff November 29 that the electoral NGO Sumate had trained more than 100,000 table witnesses (i.e., persons who will represent Rosales at the table, sign the tally sheets, and have CNE credentials, but will not serve as one of the officials administering the vote). He mentioned that the campaign had trained nearly 8,000 witnesses in addition, bringing the total nearly up to 100 percent coverage needed for the 33,000 election tables. However, at a breakfast with DCM and Polcouns on November 30, senior Rosales aide Angel Emilio Vera admitted the campaign did not expect to reach full coverage, opening up a potential for vote fraud. (Comment: Based on our discussions with Rosales' electoral advisers and electoral NGO Sumate, we estimate the total table coverage for Rosales to be just over 70 percent.)

13. (C) Reports from those outside the campaign or in mid-level positions put in question the number of trainees and, more importantly, the quality of training received. Jacqueline Mosquera, a local NGO leader working with the Carter Center, told Emboffs November 28 that Sumate's plans to train opposition witnesses had fallen apart, prompting individual political parties to take over the training. Mosquera thought the best organized witnesses would be in Caracas, Carabobo, and Zulia. Also, International Republican Institute (IRI) Country Director Max Zaldivar said the campaign is in great disorganization and had as of November 29 still not set up its operations center to process the flash reports from the field. He credited the Rosales team with being far more adept and unified than the old Coordinadora Democratica group that ran the 2004 referendum, but still said the machinery is just not there.

14. (C) Vera said the campaign had yet to purchase the high-speed scanners the team planned to use to generate quickly physical proof of fraud should it occur. He hoped that this "financial issue," with little more than three days left before voting, would be resolved in time. Amado Dounia, who will oversee one of the opposition's quick counts, told Deskoff November 28 he had received calls from rural states complaining the Rosales team was expecting too much from poll witnesses. Dounia said some witnesses were being asked to tabulate tally sheets rapidly, handle cell phone text messaging and operate high-speed scanners, technology described as "Star Wars" by some digitally illiterate volunteers.

Exit Polls and Quick Counts

15. (C) Even without a comprehensive and valid system to conduct an independent tally, the Rosales campaign can still

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rely on exit polls and quick counts. Senior Rosales communications strategist Diego Arria told Deskoff November 30 he would conduct two exit polls, one with the U.S. firm Penn and Schoen, the other with a Mexican firm. As reported in reftel, Arria plans to have updates as early as 10 o'clock on election day with subsequent two hour updates. In addition, the campaign will conduct two quick counts, the samples for which -- about 200 polling stations -- were still being drawn up as of November 29.

Early Indications of Chicanery

16. (C) Rosales' International Committee head Timoteo Zambrano told Polcouns and Deskoff November 28 the campaign will face a series of go/no-go decisions as the weekend approaches. Zambrano said that any indications that the CNE was changing the rules of the game would elicit a strong reaction from Rosales. For example, Fermin pointed out that election tables are legally constituted on Friday, December 1, with the inspection of electoral materials and checking-in of poll workers (vice the witnesses representing the campaigns). The CNE apparently selected a majority of non-Chavez supporters into the randomly drawn list of table workers several weeks ago, which drew complaints from hard-core Chavistas. Fermin said he suspects the Chavistas, having thought better of their decision, will replace many of the opposition supporters with Chavista alternates. In addition, Fermin said he had unsubstantiated reports that voting center coordinators were actually members of the Francisco Miranda Front, a radical, Cuban-trained Chavista youth movement. If that were true, he said, it would be readily apparent and the Rosales campaign might call foul even before polls open.

17. (C) Fermin also pointed out that voter identification fingerprint machines have been deployed to only eight states.

He said the pattern was such that suggested the CNE will be using the machines in urban areas where Rosales support is strong or where there are significant concentrations of public employees. This would permit the BRV to control the pace of voting stations by causing delays in the reaction times of the real-time fingerprint system. He said the presence of the machine is also an intimidation tactic against public sector workers, who have been reminded constantly throughout the campaign that those who do not support Chavez have no place in the government. Fermin pointed out the two conspicuous exceptions to the use of the fingerprint machines are in Lara and Aragua states, populous areas with very high Chavez support.

Comment

18. (C) With Chavez controlling all government entities, including the electoral court and CNE, in the event of even obvious fraud, there are no practical legal remedies available to the Rosales campaign. Fully realizing this, Rosales is preparing for the propaganda battle that will ensue once polls are open. All indications are that Rosales will not kick the table in the face of defeat unless he is presented with clear evidence of fraud (septel). Information is the ammunition in such a fight, and Rosales is disadvantaged vis-a-vis Chavez, who will have fast and accurate information from the CNE. Nevertheless, while the Rosales information net is not perfect, it is still capable of partial effectiveness come election day, especially with the quick counts and exit polls.

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